

# Milk And Honey

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by  
Rupi Kaur

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By

**Rupi Kaur**



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rupi kaur



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for  
the arms  
that hold me

my heart woke me crying last  
night  
*how can i help* i begged  
my heart said  
*write the book*

contents

the hurting

the loving

the breaking

the healing

a letter  
about the writer  
about the book

the  
hurting

*how is it so easy for you  
to be kind to people he asked*

milk and honey dripped  
from my lips as i answered

*cause people have not  
been kind to me*

the first boy that kissed me  
held my shoulders down  
like the handlebars of  
the first bicycle  
he ever rode  
i was five

he had the smell of  
starvation on his lips  
which he picked up from  
his father feasting on his mother  
at 4 a.m.

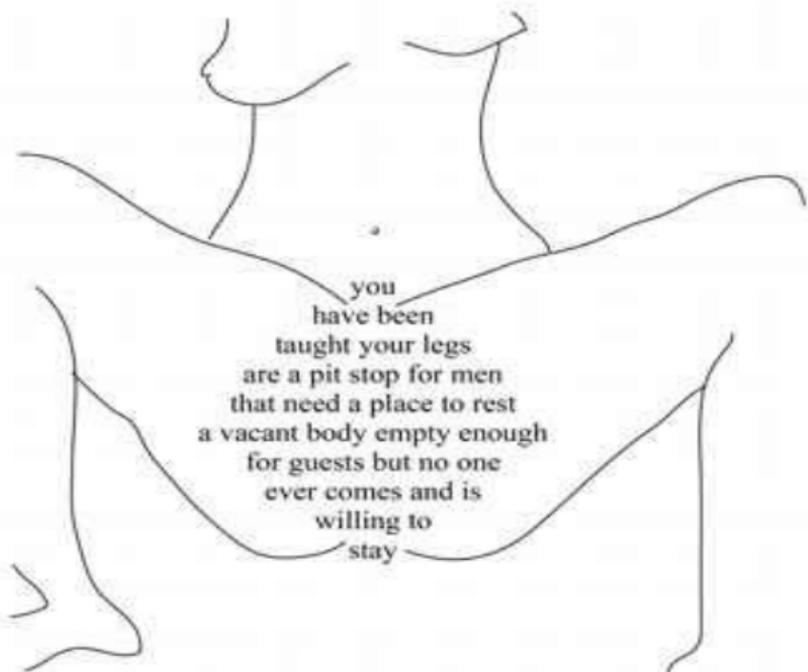
he was the first boy  
to teach me my body was  
for giving to those that wanted  
that i should feel anything

less than whole

and my god

did i feel as empty

as his mother at 4:25 a.m.



you  
have been  
taught your legs  
are a pit stop for men  
that need a place to rest  
a vacant body empty enough  
for guests but no one  
ever comes and is  
willing to  
stay

it is your blood  
in my veins  
tell me how i'm  
supposed to forget

the therapist places  
the doll in front of you  
it is the size of girls  
your uncles like touching

*point to where his hands were*

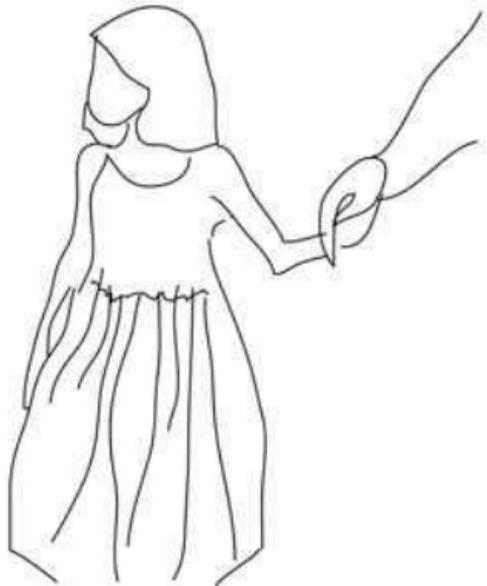
you point to the spot  
between its legs the one  
he fingered out of you  
like a confession

*how're you feeling*

you pull the lump  
in your throat out  
with your teeth

and say *fine*  
*numb really*

- *midweek sessions*



he was supposed to be  
the first male love of your life  
you still search for him  
everywhere

- *father*

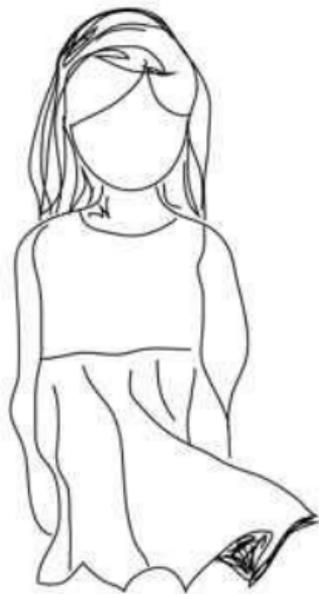
you were so afraid  
of my voice  
i decided to be  
afraid of it too



she was a rose  
in the hands of those  
who had no intention  
of keeping her

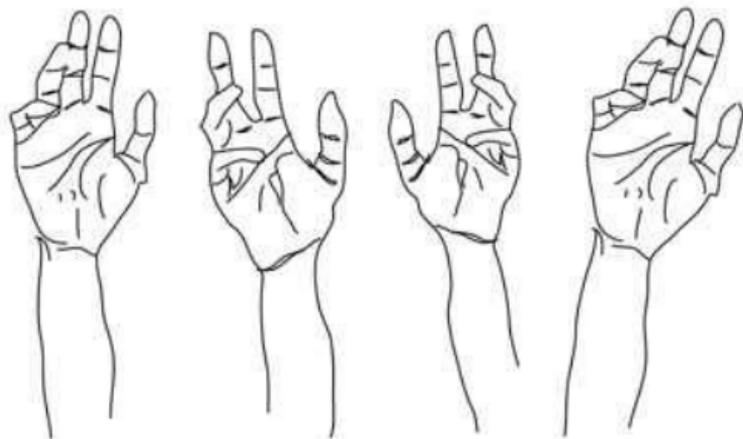
every time you  
tell your daughter  
you yell at her  
out of love  
you teach her to confuse  
anger with kindness  
which seems like a good idea  
till she grows up to  
trust men who hurt her  
cause they look so much  
like you

- *to fathers with daughters*



*i've had sex* she said  
but i don't know  
what making love  
feels like

if i knew what  
safety looked like  
i would have spent  
less time falling into  
arms that were not



sex takes the consent of two  
if one person is lying there not  
doing anything  
cause they are not ready  
or not in the mood  
or simply don't want to  
yet the other is having sex  
with their body it's not love  
it is rape

the idea that we are  
so capable of love  
but still choose  
to be toxic



there is no bigger illusion in the  
world  
than the idea that a woman will  
bring dishonor into a home  
if she tries to keep her heart  
and her body safe

you pinned  
my legs to  
the ground  
with your feet  
and demanded  
i stand up



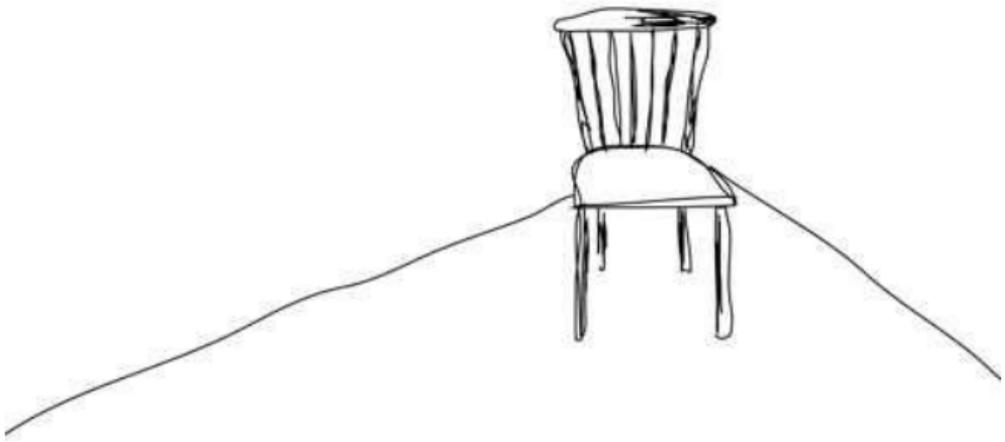
the rape will  
tear you  
in half

but it  
will not  
end you

you have sadness  
living in places  
sadness shouldn't live



a daughter should  
not have to  
beg her father  
for a relationship



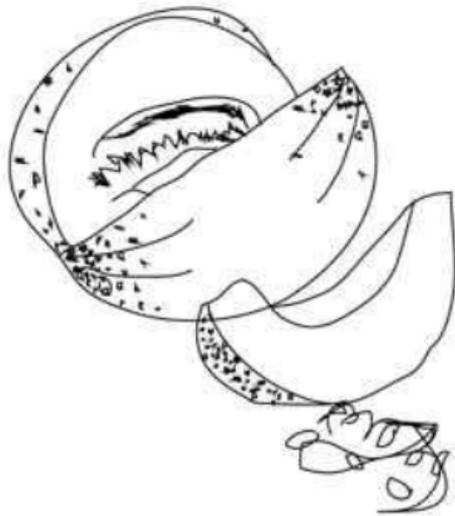
trying to convince myself  
i am allowed  
to take up space  
is like writing with  
my left hand  
when i was born  
to use my right

- *the idea of shrinking is*

*hereditary*

you tell me to quiet down cause  
my opinions make me less  
beautiful  
but i was not made with a fire in  
my belly  
so i could be put out  
i was not made with a lightness on  
my tongue  
so i could be easy to swallow  
i was made heavy  
half blade and half silk  
difficult to forget and not easy  
for the mind to follow

he guts her  
with his fingers  
like he's scraping  
the inside of a  
cantaloupe clean



your mother  
is in the habit of  
offering more love  
than you can carry

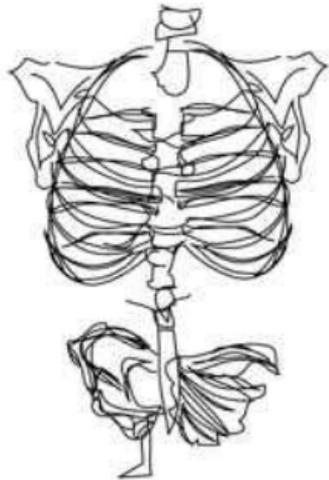
your father is absent

you are a war  
the border between two countries  
the collateral damage  
the paradox that joins the two  
but also splits them apart

emptying out of my mother's  
belly  
was my first act of disappearance  
learning to shrink for a family  
who likes their daughters invisible  
was the second  
the art of being empty  
is simple  
believe them when they say  
you are nothing  
repeat it to yourself  
like a wish  
*i am nothing*  
*i am nothing*  
*i am nothing*  
so often  
the only reason you know

you're still alive is from the  
heaving of your chest

- *the art of being empty*



you look just like your mother

        i guess i do carry her  
tenderness well

you both have the same eyes

        cause we are both  
exhausted

and the hands

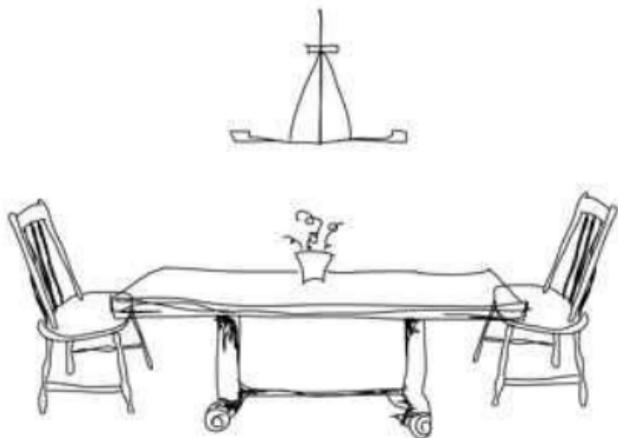
        we share the same wilting  
fingers

but that rage your mother doesn't  
wear that anger

you're right  
this rage is the one thing  
i get from my father

(homage to warsan shire's *inheritance*)

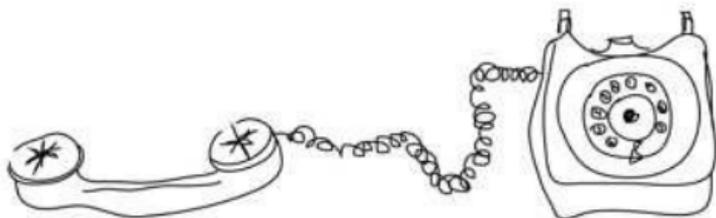
when my mother opens her mouth  
to have a conversation at dinner  
my father shoves the word hush  
between her lips and tells her to  
never speak with her mouth full  
this is how the women in my  
family  
learned to live with their mouths  
closed



our knees  
pried open  
by cousins  
and uncles  
and men  
our bodies touched  
by all the wrong people  
that even in a bed full of safety  
we are afraid

father. you always call to say  
nothing in particular. you ask what  
i'm doing or where i am and when  
the silence stretches like a  
lifetime between us i scramble to  
find questions to keep the  
conversation going. what i long to  
say most is. i understand this  
world broke you. it has been so  
hard on your feet. i don't blame  
you for not knowing how to  
remain soft with me. sometimes i  
stay up thinking of all the places  
you are hurting which you'll never  
care to mention. i come from the  
same aching blood. from the same  
bone so desperate for attention i

collapse in on myself. i am your  
daughter. i know the small talk is  
the only way you know how to tell  
me you love me. cause it is the  
only way i know how to tell you.



you plough into me with two fingers and i am mostly shocked. it feels like rubber against an open wound. i do not like it. you begin pushing faster and faster. but i feel nothing. you search my face for a reaction so i begin acting like the naked women in the videos you watch when you think no one's looking. i imitate their moans. hollow and hungry. you ask if it feels good and i say *yes* so quickly it sounds rehearsed. but the acting. you do not notice.

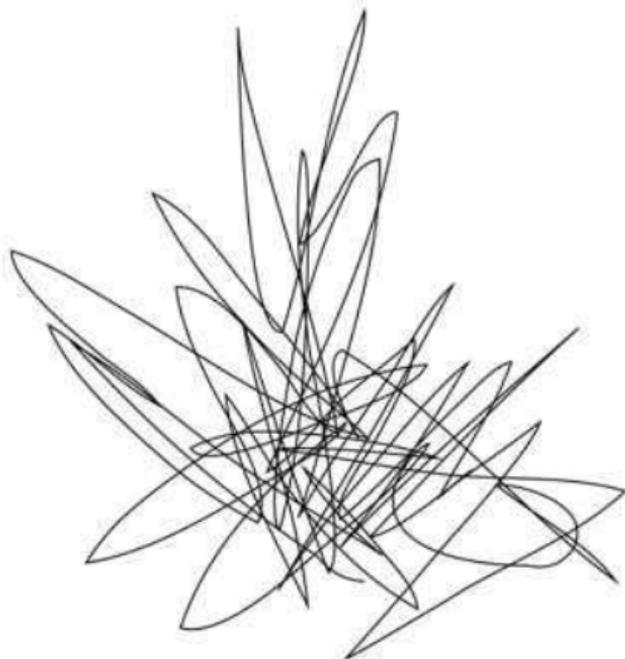


the thing about having  
an alcoholic parent  
is an alcoholic parent  
does not exist

simply  
an alcoholic  
who could not stay sober  
long enough to raise their kids

i can't tell if my mother is  
terrified or in love with  
my father it all  
looks the same

i flinch when you touch me  
i fear it is him



the  
loving

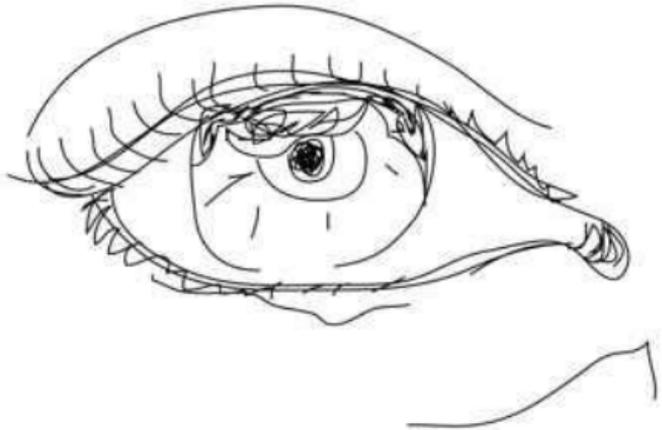
when my mother was pregnant  
with her second child i was four  
i pointed at her swollen belly  
confused at how  
my mother had gotten so big in  
such little time  
my father scooped me in his tree  
trunk arms and  
said the closest thing to god on  
this earth  
is a woman's body it's where life  
comes from  
and to have a grown man tell me  
something  
so powerful at such a young age  
changed me to see the entire  
universe

rested at my mother's feet



i struggle so deeply  
to understand  
how someone can  
pour their entire soul  
blood and energy  
into someone  
without wanting  
anything in  
return

*- i will have to wait till i'm a  
mother*

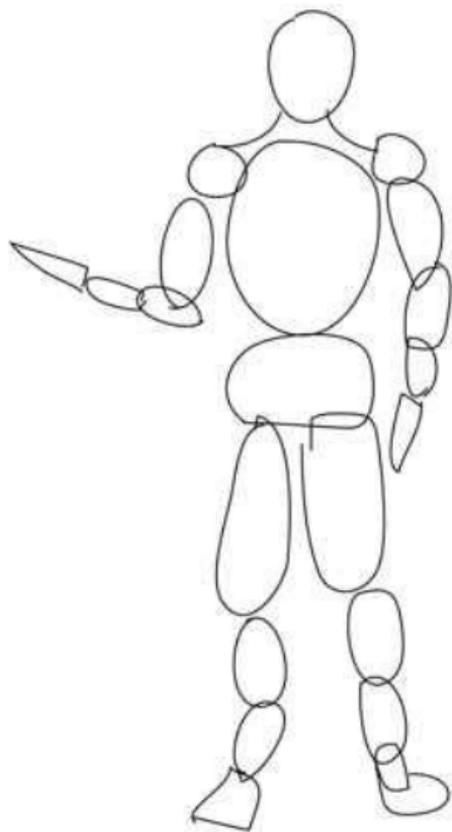


no  
it won't  
be love at  
first sight when  
we meet it'll be love  
at first remembrance cause  
i've seen you in my mother's eyes

when she tells me to marry the  
type  
of man i'd want to raise my son to  
be like

every revolution  
starts and ends  
with his lips

*what am i to you* he asks  
i put my hands in his lap  
and whisper *you*  
*are every hope*  
*i've ever had*  
*in human form*



my favorite thing about you is  
your smell  
you smell like  
earth  
herbs  
gardens  
a little more  
human than the rest of us

i know i  
should crumble  
for better reasons  
but have you seen  
that boy he brings  
the sun to its  
knees every  
night



you are the faint line  
between faith and  
blindly waiting

- *letter to my future lover*

nothing is safer  
than the sound of you  
reading out loud to me

- *the perfect date*



he placed his hands  
on my mind  
before reaching  
for my waist  
my hips  
or my lips  
he didn't call me  
beautiful first  
he called me  
exquisite

- *how he touches me*

i am learning  
how to love him  
by loving myself



he says

*i am sorry i am not an easy person  
to want*

i look at him surprised

*who said i wanted easy*

*i don't crave easy*

*i crave goddamn difficult*

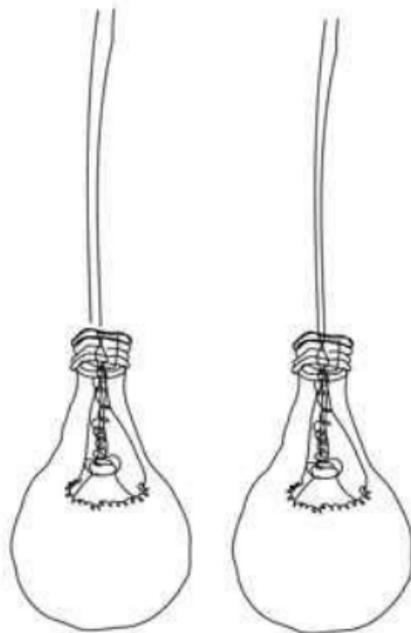
the very thought of you  
has my legs spread apart  
like an easel with a canvas  
begging for art



i am ready for you  
i have always  
been  
ready for you

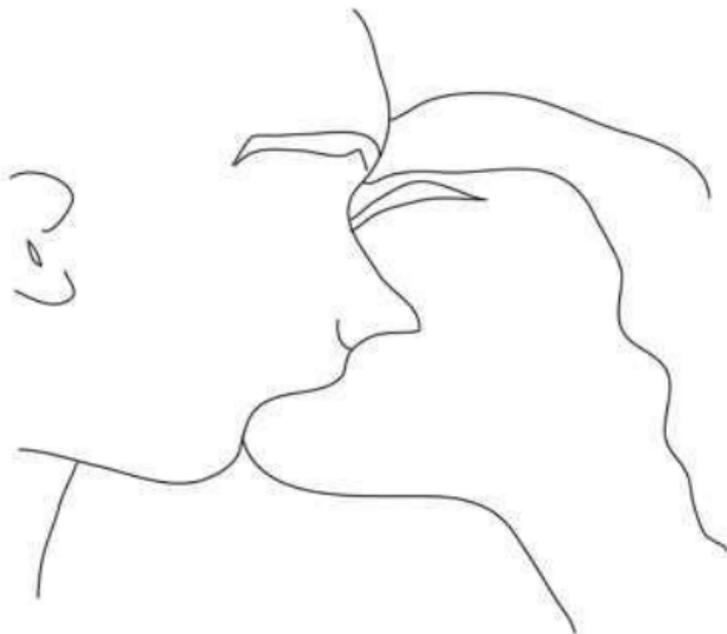
- *the first time*

i do not want to have you  
to fill the empty parts of me  
i want to be full on my own  
i want to be so complete  
i could light a whole city  
and then  
i want to have you  
cause the two of us combined  
could set it on fire



love will come  
and when love comes  
love will hold you  
love will call your name  
and you will melt  
sometimes though  
love will hurt you but  
love will never mean to  
love will play no games  
cause love knows life  
has been hard enough already

i'd be lying if i said  
you make me speechless  
the truth is you make my  
tongue so weak it forgets  
what language to speak in



he asks me what i do  
i tell him i work for a small  
company  
that makes packaging for—  
he stops me midsentence  
*no not what you do to pay the bills*  
*what drives you crazy*  
*what keeps you up at night*

i tell him *i write*  
he asks me to show him  
something  
i take the tips of my fingers  
place them inside his forearm  
and graze them down his wrist  
goose bumps rise to the surface  
i see his mouth clench

muscles tighten  
his eyes pore into mine  
as though i'm the reason  
for making them blink  
i break gaze just as  
he inches toward me  
i step back

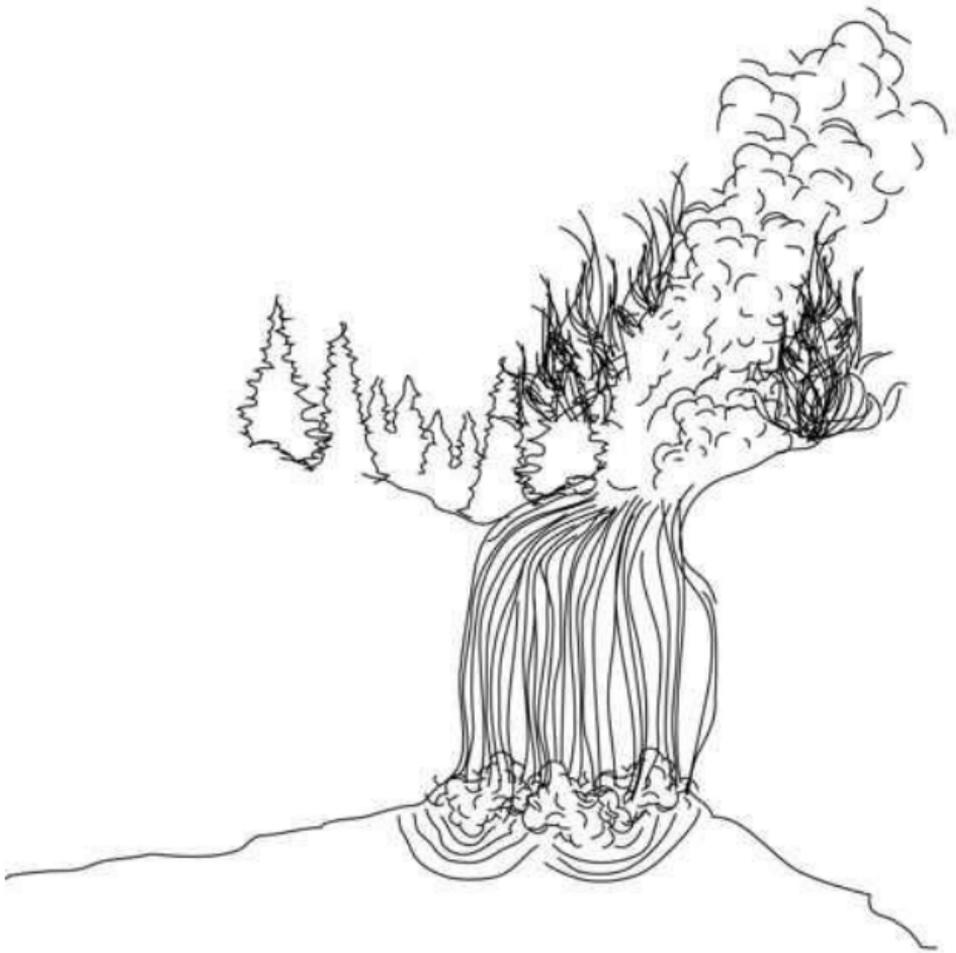
*so that's what you do  
you command attention  
my cheeks flush as  
i smile shyly  
confessing  
i can't help it*

you might not have been my first  
love  
but you were the love that made  
all the other loves  
irrelevant



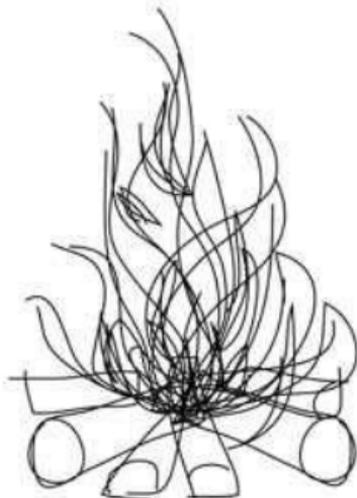
you've touched me  
without even  
touching me

how do you turn  
a forest fire like me  
so soft i turn into  
running water



you look like you smell of  
honey and no pain  
let me have a taste of that

your name is  
the strongest  
positive and negative  
connotation in any language  
it either lights me up or  
leaves me aching for days

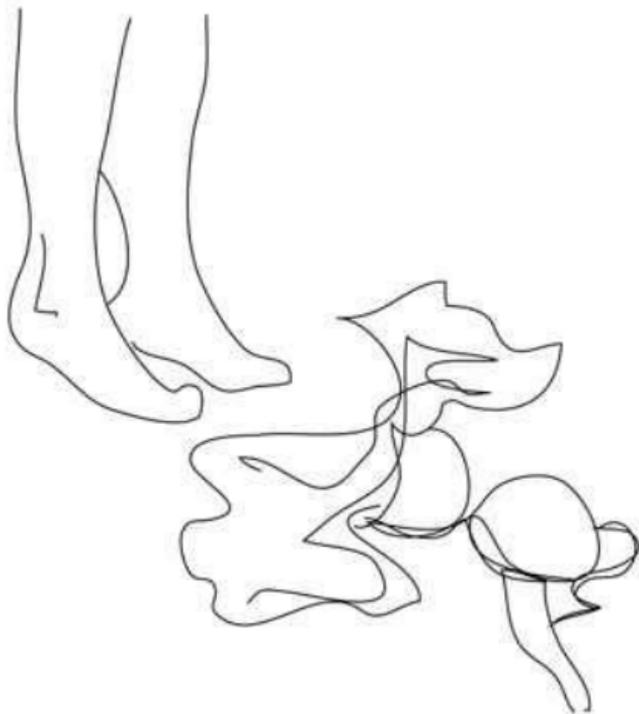


*you talk too much*

he whispers into my ear

*i can think of better ways to use  
that mouth*

it's your voice  
that undresses me



my name sounds so good  
french kissing your tongue

you wrap your fingers  
around my hair  
and pull  
this  
is how you make  
music out of me

- *foreplay*



on days  
like this  
i need you to  
run your fingers  
through my hair  
and speak softly

- *you*

i want your hands  
to hold  
not my hands  
your lips  
to kiss  
not my lips  
but other places



i need someone  
who knows struggle  
as well as i do  
someone  
willing to hold my feet in their lap  
on days it is too difficult to stand  
the type of person who gives  
exactly what i need  
before i even know i need it  
the type of lover who hears me  
even when i do not speak  
is the type of understanding  
i demand

- *the type of lover i need*

you move my hand  
between my legs  
and whisper  
*make those pretty little fingers  
dance for me*

*- solo performance*



we've been arguing more than we ought to. about things neither of us remember or care about cause that's how we avoid the bigger questions. instead of asking why we don't say *i love you* to one another as often as we used to. we fight about things like: who was supposed to get up and turn the lights off first. or who was supposed to pop the frozen pizza in the oven after work. taking hits at the most vulnerable parts of one another. we're like fingers on thorns honey. we know exactly where it hurts.

and everything is on the table tonight. like that one time you whispered a name i'm pretty sure wasn't mine in your sleep. or last week when you said you were working late. so i called work but they said you'd already left a couple hours ago. where were you for those couple hours.

i know. i know. your excuses make all the sense in the world. and i get a little carried away for no good reason and eventually begin crying. but what else do you expect baby. i love you so much. i'm sorry i thought you were lying.

that's when you hold your head  
with your hands in frustration.  
half begging me to stop. half tired  
and sick of it. the toxin in our  
mouths has burnt holes in our  
cheeks. we look less alive than we  
used to. less color in our faces. but  
don't kid yourself. no matter how  
bad it gets we both know you still  
wanna nail me to the ground.

especially when i'm screaming so  
loud our fighting wakes the  
neighbors. and they come running  
to the door to save us. baby don't  
open it.

instead. lie me down. lay me open

like a map. and with your finger  
trace the places you still want to  
\*\*\*\* out of me. kiss me like i am  
the center point of gravity and you  
are falling into me like my soul is  
the focal point of yours. and when  
your mouth is kissing not my  
mouth but other places. my legs  
will split apart out of habit. and  
that's when. i pull you in.  
welcome you. home.

when the entire street is looking  
out their windows wondering what  
all the commotion is. and the fire  
trucks come rolling in to save us  
but they can't distinguish whether  
these flames began with our anger

or our passion. i will smile. throw  
my head back. arch my body like a  
mountain you want to split in half.  
baby lick me.

like your mouth has the gift of  
reading and i'm your favorite  
book. find your favorite page in  
the soft spot between my legs and  
read it carefully. fluently. vividly.  
don't you dare leave a single word  
untouched. and i swear my ending  
will be so good. the last few words  
will come. running to your mouth.  
and when you're done. take a seat.  
cause it's my turn to make music  
with my knees pressed to the  
ground.

sweet baby. this. is how we pull  
language out of one another with  
the flick of our tongues. this is  
how we have the conversation.  
this. is how we make up.

- *how we make up*

the  
breaking



i always  
get myself  
into this mess  
i always let him  
tell me i am beautiful  
and half believe it  
i always jump thinking  
he will catch me  
at the fall  
i am hopelessly  
a lover and  
a dreamer and  
that will be the  
death of me



when my mother says i deserve  
better  
i snap to your defense out of habit  
*he still loves me* i shout  
she looks at me with defeated eyes  
the way a parent looks at their  
child  
when they know this is the type of  
pain  
even they can't fix  
and says  
*it means nothing to me if he loves  
you  
if he can't do a single wretched  
thing about it*

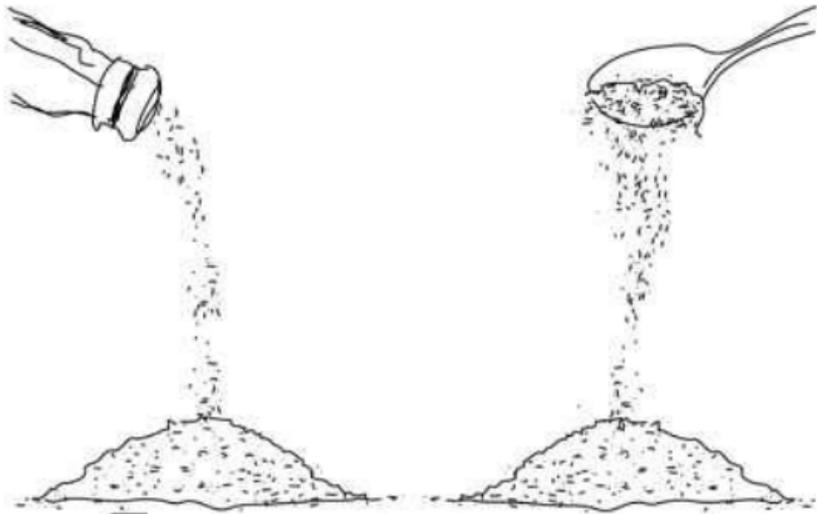
you were so distant  
i forgot you were there at all



you said. if it is meant to be. fate will bring us back together. for a second i wonder if you are really that naive. if you really believe fate works like that. as if it lives in the sky staring down at us. as if it has five fingers and spends its time placing us like pieces of chess. as if it is not the choices we make. who taught you that. tell me. who convinced you. you've been given a heart and a mind that isn't yours to use. that your actions do not define what will become of you. i want to scream and shout *it's us you fool. we're the only ones that can bring us*

*back together.* but instead i sit quietly. smiling softly through quivering lips thinking. isn't it such a tragic thing. when you can see it so clearly but the other person doesn't.

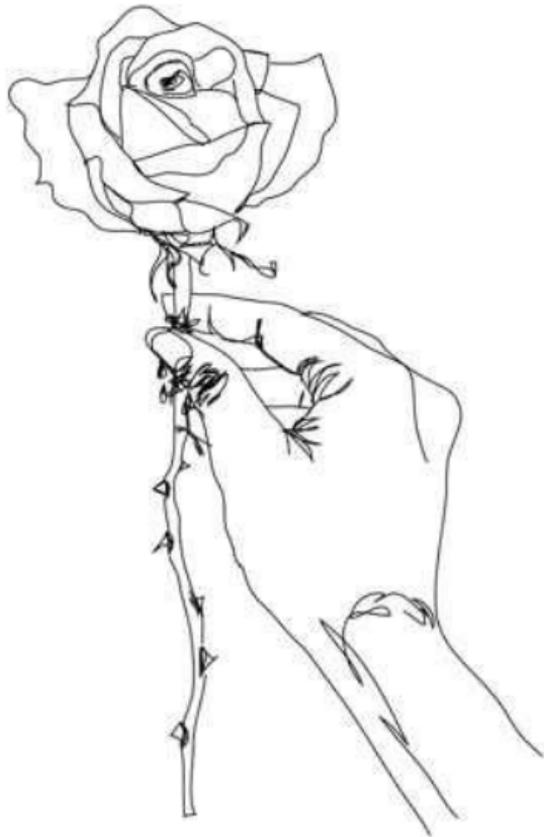
don't mistake  
salt for sugar  
if he wants to  
be with you  
he will  
it's that simple



he only whispers *i love you*  
as he slips his hands  
down the waistband  
of your pants

this is where you must  
understand the difference  
between want and need  
you may want that boy  
but you certainly  
don't need him

you were temptingly beautiful  
but stung when i got close



the woman who comes after me will be a bootleg version of who i am. she will try and write poems for you to erase the ones i've left memorized on your lips but her lines could never punch you in the stomach the way mine did. she will then try to make love to your body. but she will never lick, caress, or suck like me. she will be a sad replacement of the woman you let slip. nothing she does will excite you and this will break her. when she is tired of falling apart for a man that doesn't give back what he takes she will recognize me in your eyelids staring at her

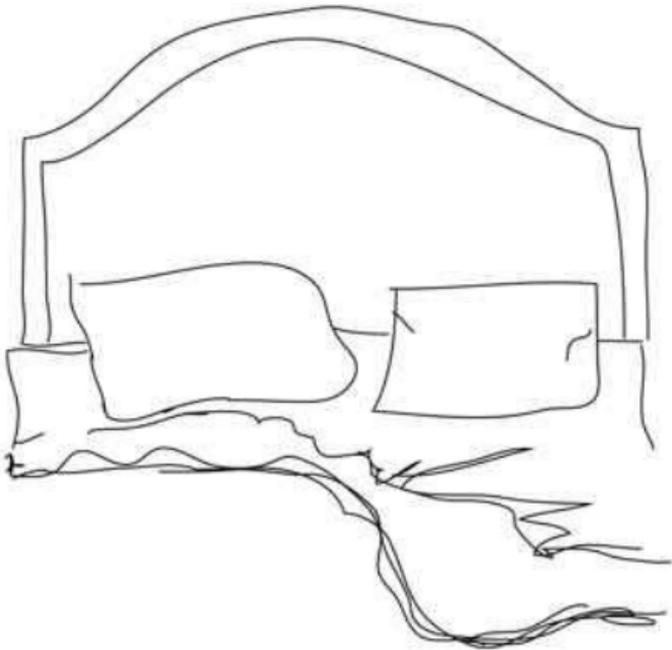
with pity and it'll hit her. how can she love a man who is busy loving someone he can never get his hands on again.

the next time you  
have your coffee black  
you'll taste the bitter  
state he left you in  
it will make you weep  
but you'll never  
stop drinking  
you'd rather have the  
darkest parts of him  
than have nothing



more than anything  
i want to save you  
from myself

you have spent enough nights  
with his manhood curled inside  
your legs  
to forget what loneliness feels like



you whisper

*i love you*

what you mean is

*i don't want you to leave*

that's the  
thing about love  
it marinates your lips  
till the only word your  
mouth remembers  
is his name

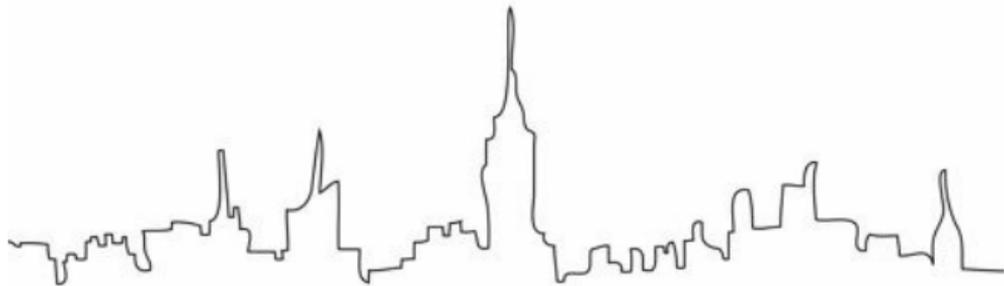


it must hurt to know  
i am your most  
beautiful  
regret

i didn't leave because  
i stopped loving you  
i left because the longer  
i stayed the less  
i loved myself



you mustn't have to  
make them want you  
they must want you themselves



did you think i was a city  
big enough for a weekend getaway  
i am the town surrounding it  
the one you've never heard of  
but always pass through  
there are no neon lights here  
no skyscrapers or statues  
but there is thunder  
for i make bridges tremble  
i am not street meat i am  
homemade jam  
thick enough to cut the sweetest

thing your lips will touch  
i am not police sirens  
i am the crackle of a fireplace  
i'd burn you and you still  
couldn't take your eyes off me  
cause i'd look so beautiful doing it  
you'd blush  
i am not a hotel room i am home  
i am not the whiskey you want  
i am the water you need  
don't come here with expectations  
and try to make a vacation out of  
me

the one who arrives after you  
will remind me love is  
supposed to be soft

he will taste  
like the poetry  
i wish i could write

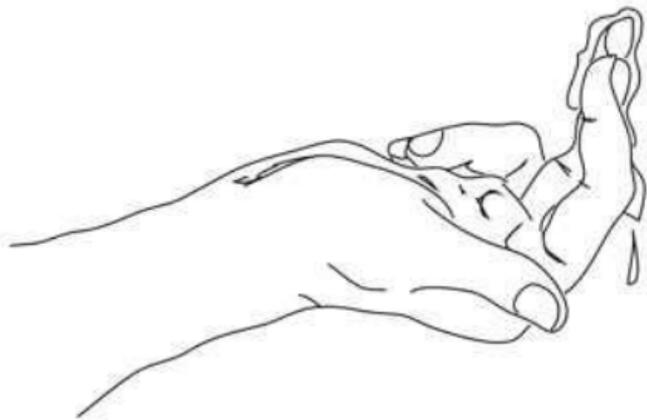
if  
he can't help but  
degrade other women  
when they're not looking  
if toxicity is central  
to his language  
he could hold you  
in his lap and be soft  
honey  
that man could feed you sugar and  
douse you in rose water  
but that still could not  
make him sweet

*- if you want to know the type of  
man he is*



i am a museum full of art  
but you had your eyes shut

you must have known  
you were wrong  
when your fingers  
were dipped inside me  
searching for honey that  
would not come for you



the thing  
worth holding on to  
would not have let go

when you are broken  
and he has left you  
do not question  
whether you were  
enough  
the problem was  
you were so enough  
he was not able to carry it



love made the danger  
in you look like safety

even when you undress her  
you are searching for me  
i am sorry i  
taste so good  
when the two of you  
make love it is  
still my name  
that rolls off your  
tongue accidentally

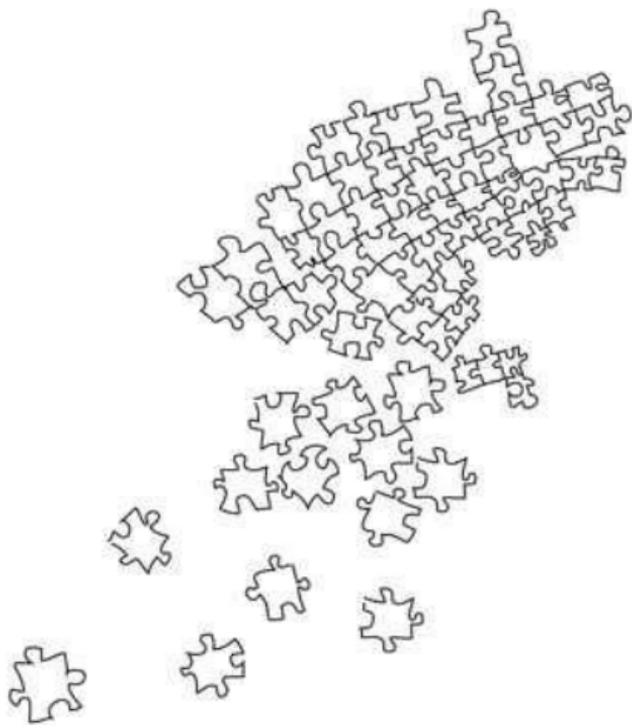


you treat them like they  
have a heart like yours  
but not everyone can be as  
soft and as tender

you don't see the  
person they are  
you see the person  
they have the potential to be

you give and give till  
they pull everything out of you  
and leave you empty

i had to leave  
i was tired of  
allowing you to  
make me feel  
anything less  
than whole



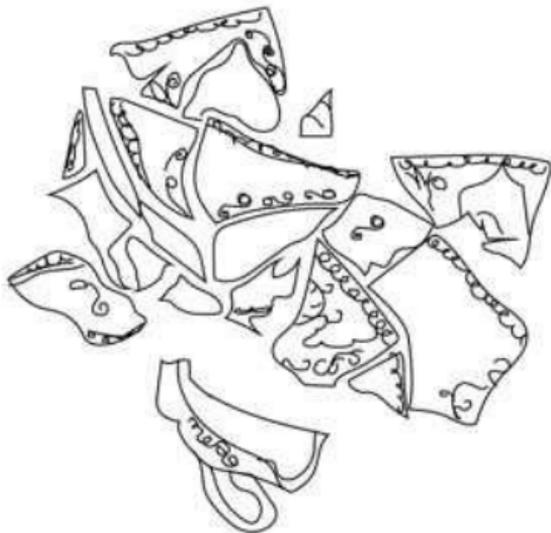
you were the most beautiful thing i'd ever felt till now. and i was convinced you'd remain the most beautiful thing i'd ever feel. do you know how limiting that is. to think at such a ripe young age i'd experienced the most exhilarating person i'd ever meet. how i'd spend the rest of my life just settling. to think i'd tasted the rawest form of honey and everything else would be refined and synthetic. that nothing beyond this point would add up. that all the years beyond me could not combine themselves to be sweeter than you.

- *falsehood*

i don't know what living a  
balanced life feels like  
when i am sad  
i don't cry i pour  
when i am happy  
i don't smile i glow  
when i am angry  
i don't yell i burn

the good thing about feeling in  
extremes is  
when i love i give them wings  
but perhaps that isn't  
such a good thing cause  
they always tend to leave  
and you should see me  
when my heart is broken

i don't grieve  
i shatter



i came all this way  
to give you all these things  
but you aren't even looking



the abused  
and the  
abuser

- *i have been both*

i am undoing you  
from my skin



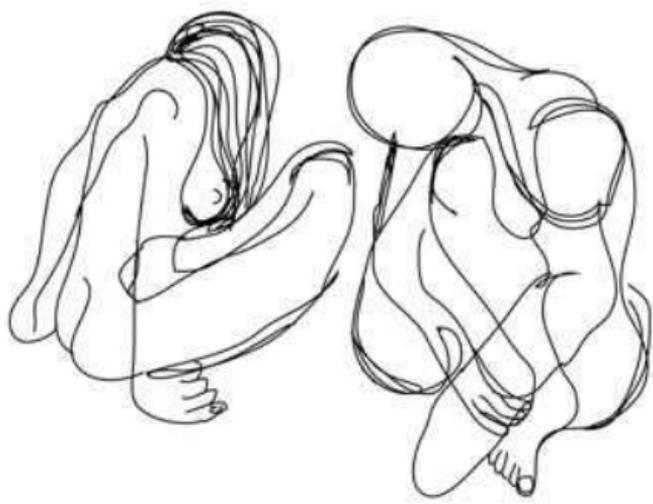
it wasn't you i was kissing  
— don't be mistaken

it was him on my mind

your lips were just convenient

it always comes back to you  
boils  
circles  
itches  
its way back to you

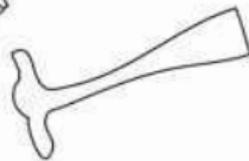
i was music  
but you had your ears cut off



my tongue is sour  
from the hunger of  
missing you

i will not have you  
build me into your life  
when  
what i want is to  
build a life with you

- *the difference*



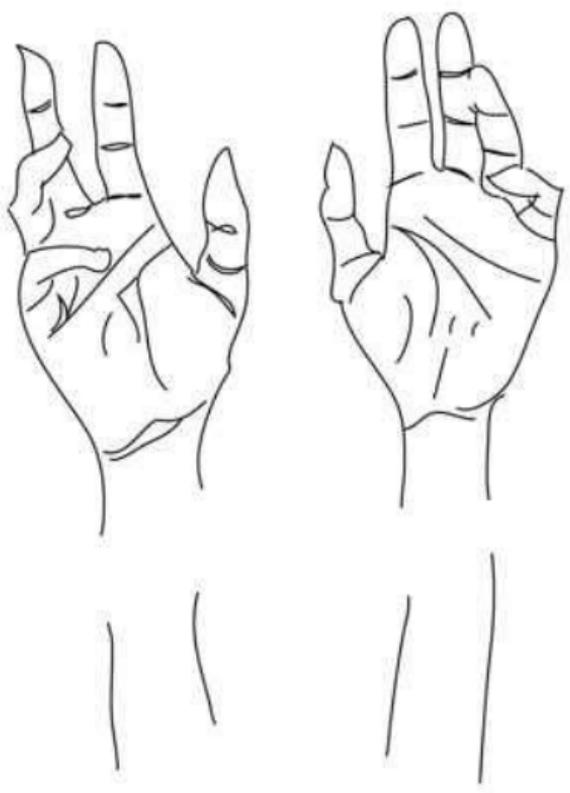
rivers fall from my mouth  
tears my eyes can't carry

you are snakeskin  
and i keep shedding you somehow  
my mind is forgetting  
every exquisite detail  
of your face  
the letting go has  
become the forgetting  
which is the most  
pleasant and saddest thing  
to have happened



you were not wrong for leaving  
you were wrong for coming back  
and thinking  
you could have me  
when it was convenient  
and leave when it was not

how can i write  
if he took my hands  
with him



neither of us is happy  
but neither of us wants to leave  
so we keep breaking one another  
and calling it love

we began  
with honesty  
let us end  
in it too

- *us*



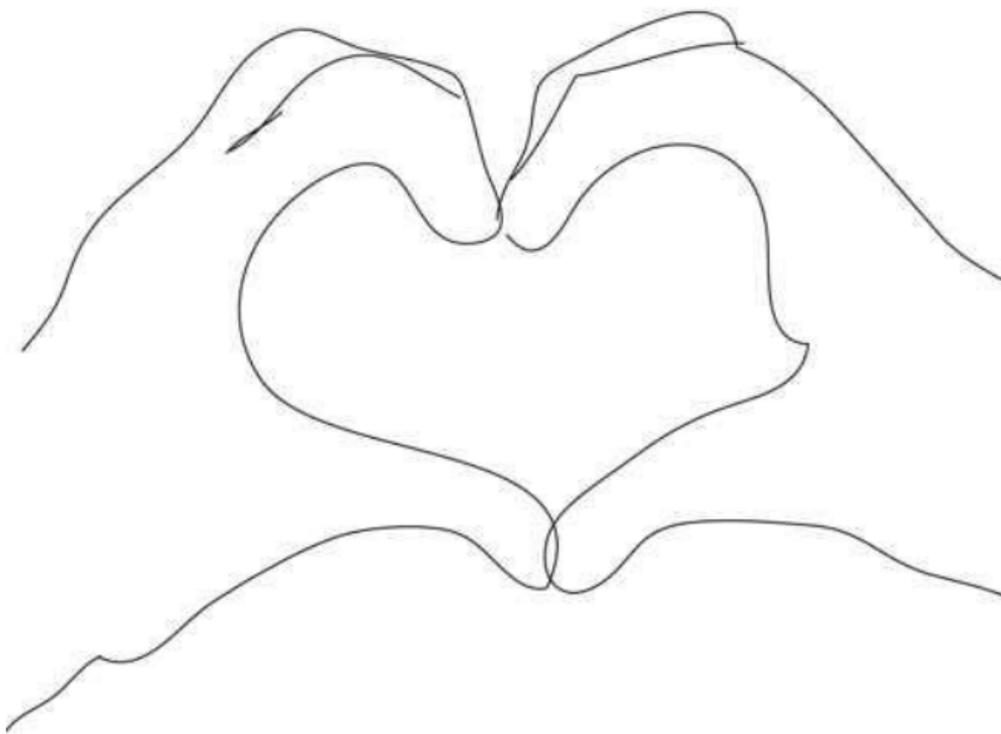
your voice  
alone  
drives me  
to tears

i don't know why  
i split myself open  
for others knowing  
sewing myself up  
hurts this much  
afterward



people go  
but how  
they left  
always stays

love is not cruel  
we are cruel  
love is not a game  
we have made a game  
out of love



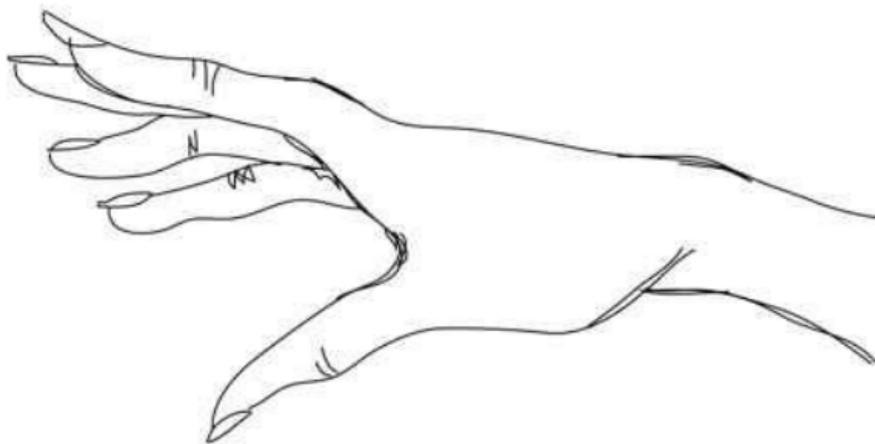
how can our love die  
if it's written  
in these pages

even after the hurt  
the loss  
the pain  
the breaking  
your body is still  
the only one  
i want to be  
undressed under



the night after you left  
i woke up so broken  
the only place to put the pieces  
were the bags under my eyes

*stay*  
i whispered  
as you  
shut the door behind you



i am confident i am over you. so much that some mornings i wake up with a smile on my face and my hands pressed together thanking the universe for pulling you out of me. thank god i cry. thank god you left. i would not be the empire i am today if you had stayed.

but then.

there are some nights i imagine what i might do if you showed up. how if you walked into the room this very second every awful thing you've ever done would be tossed

out the closest window and all the love would rise up again. it would pour through my eyes as if it never really left in the first place. as if it's been practicing how to stay silent so long only so it could be this loud on your arrival. can someone explain that. how even when the love leaves. it doesn't leave. how even when i am so past you. i am so helplessly brought back to you.

*he isn't coming back*  
whispered my head  
*he has to*  
sobbed my heart

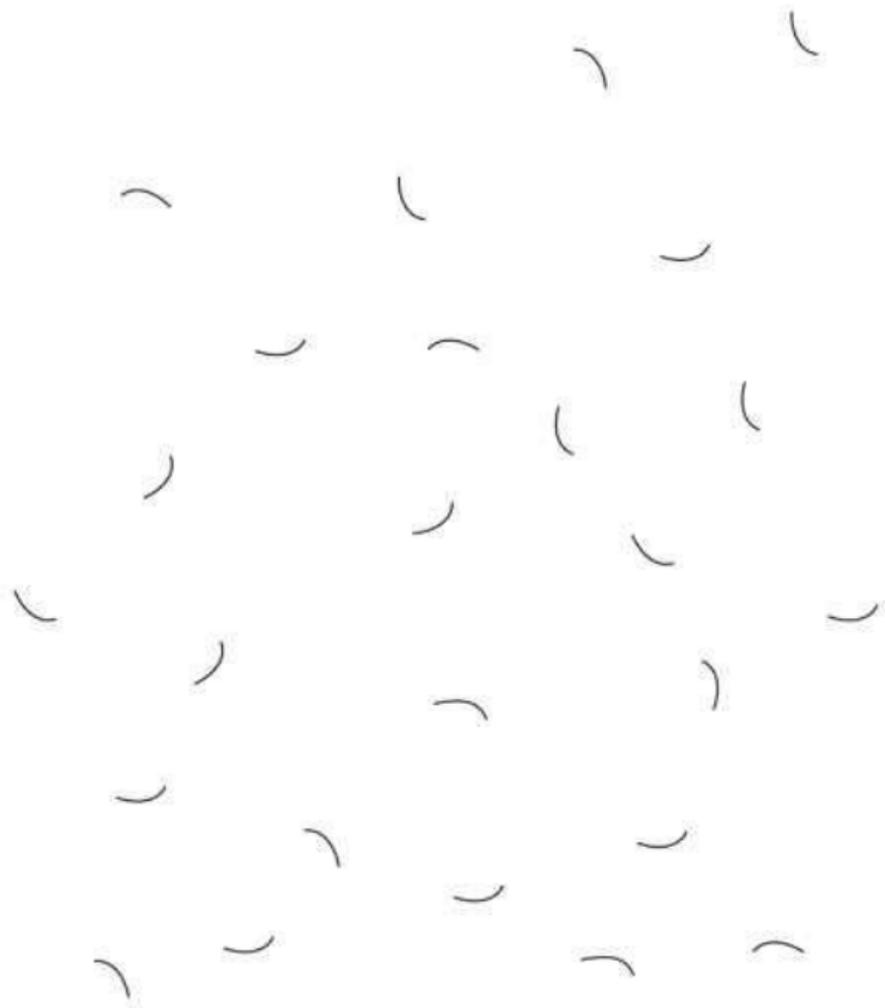
- *wilting*



i don't want to be friends  
i want all of you

- *more*

i am losing parts of you like i lose  
eyelashes  
unknowingly and everywhere

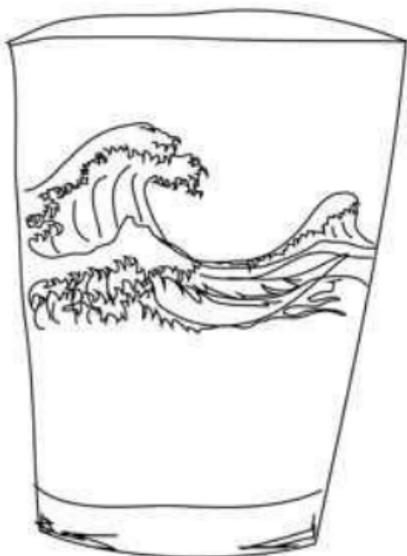


you cannot leave  
and have me too  
i cannot exist in  
two places at once

*- when you ask if we can still be  
friends*

i am water

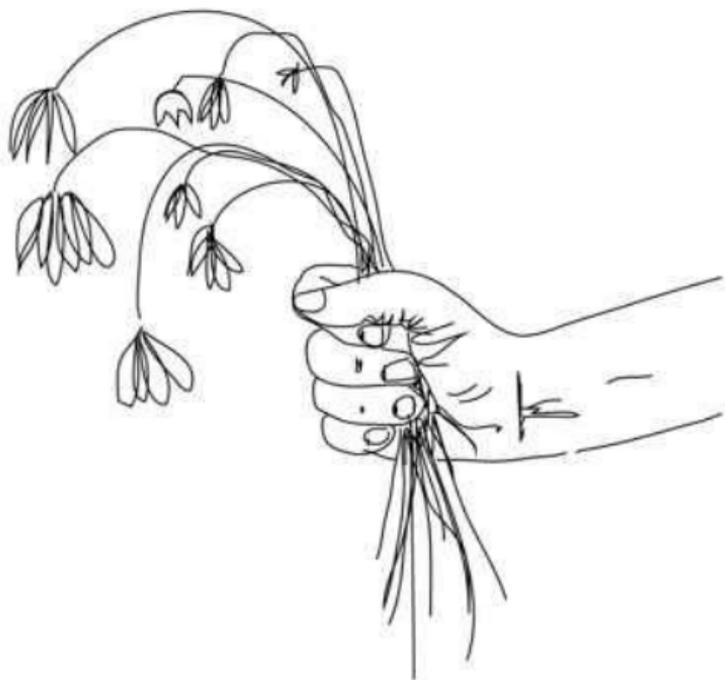
soft enough  
to offer life  
tough enough  
to drown it away



what i miss most is how you loved me. but what i didn't know was how you loved me had so much to do with the person i was. it was a reflection of everything i gave to you. coming back to me. how did i not see that. how. did i sit here soaking in the idea that no one else would love me that way. when it was i that taught you. when it was i that showed you how to fill. the way i needed to be filled. how cruel i was to myself. giving you credit for my warmth simply because you had felt it. thinking it was you who gave me strength. wit. beauty. simply because you

recognized it. as if i was already  
not these things before i met you.  
as if i did not remain all these  
once you left.

you leave  
but you don't stay gone  
why do you do that  
why do you  
abandon the thing you want to  
keep  
why do you linger  
in a place you do not want to stay  
why do you think it's okay to do  
both  
go and return all at once



i will tell you about selfish people. even when they know they will hurt you they walk into your life to taste you because you are the type of being they don't want to miss out on. you are too much shine to not be felt. so when they have gotten a good look at everything you have to offer. when they have taken your skin your hair your secrets with them. when they realize how real this is. how much of a storm you are and it hits them.

that is when the cowardice sets in.  
that is when the person you

thought they were is replaced by the sad reality of what they are. that is when they lose every fighting bone in their body and leave after saying *you will find better than me.*

you will stand there naked with half of them still hidden somewhere inside you and sob. asking them why they did it. why they forced you to love them when they had no intention of loving you back and they'll say something along the lines of *i just had to try. i had to give it a chance. it was you after all.*

but that isn't romantic. it isn't sweet. the idea that they were so engulfed by your existence they had to risk breaking it for the sake of knowing they weren't the one missing out. your existence meant that little next to their curiosity of you.

that is the thing about selfish people. they gamble entire beings. entire souls to please their own. one second they are holding you like the world in their lap and the next they have belittled you to a mere picture. a moment. something of the past. one second. they swallow you up and whisper

they want to spend the rest of their life with you. but the moment they sense fear. they are already halfway out the door. without having the nerve to let you go with grace. as if the human heart means that little to them.

and after all this. after all of the taking. the nerve. isn't it sad and funny how people have more guts these days to undress you with their fingers than they do to pick up the phone and call. apologize. for the loss. and this is how you lose her.

- *selfish*

1. take refuge in your bed.
2. cry. till the tears stop (this will take a few days).
3. don't listen to slow songs.
4. delete their number from your phone even though it is memorized on your fingertips.
5. don't look at old photos.
6. find the closest ice cream shop and treat yourself to two scoops of mint chocolate chip. the mint will calm your heart. you deserve the chocolate.
7. buy new bed sheets.
8. collect all the gifts, t-shirts, and everything with their smell on it

and drop it off at a donation center.

9. plan a trip.
10. perfect the art of smiling and nodding when someone brings their name up in conversation.
11. start a new project.
12. whatever you do. do not call.
13. do not beg for what does not want to stay.
14. stop crying at some point.
15. allow yourself to feel foolish for believing you could've built the rest of your life in someone else's stomach.
16. breathe.

the way they  
leave  
tells you  
everything





the  
healing

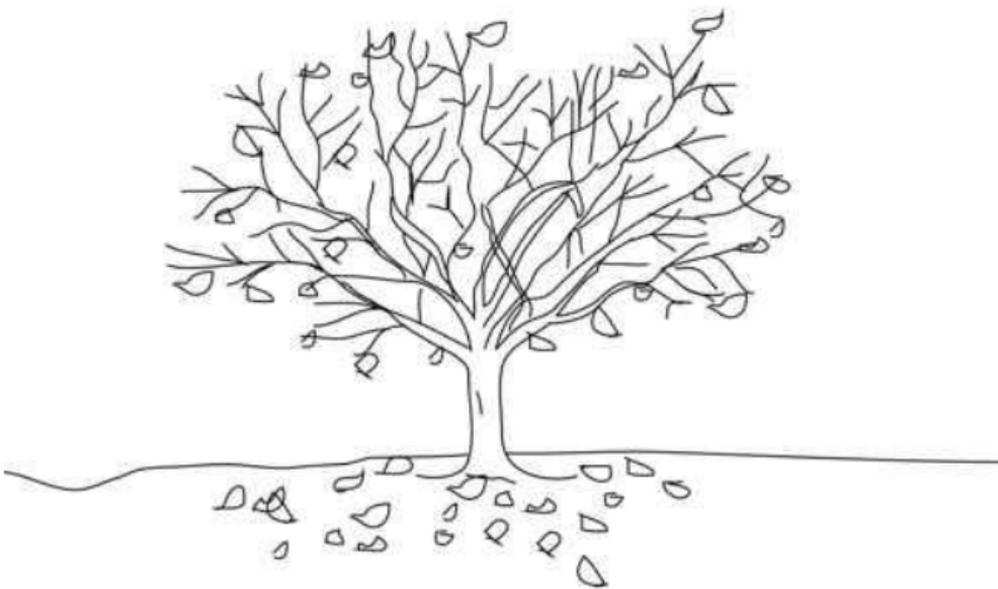
perhaps  
i don't deserve  
nice things  
cause i am paying  
for sins i don't  
remember



the thing about writing is  
i can't tell if it's healing  
or destroying me

do not bother holding on to  
that thing that does not want you

*- you cannot make it stay*



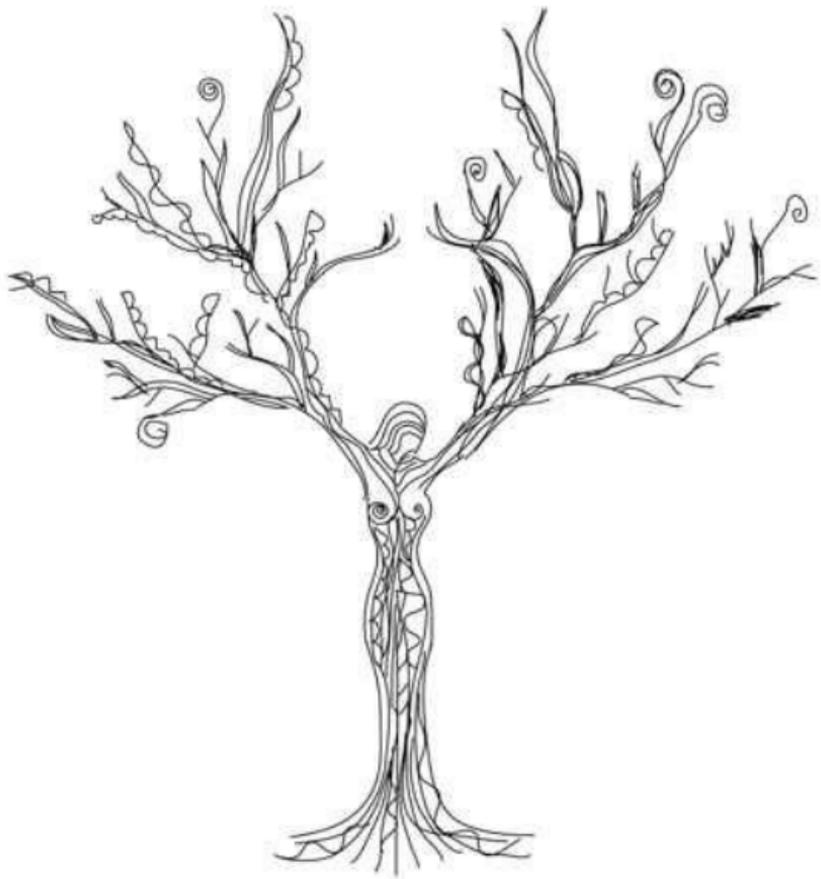
you must enter a relationship  
with yourself  
before anyone else

accept that you deserve more  
than painful love  
life is moving  
the healthiest thing  
for your heart is  
to move with it



it is a part of the  
human experience to feel pain  
do not be afraid  
open yourself to it

- *evolving*



loneliness is a sign you are in  
desperate need of yourself

you are in the habit  
of co-depending  
on people to  
make up for what  
you think you lack

who tricked you  
into believing  
another person  
was meant to complete you  
when the most they can do is  
complement

do not look for healing  
at the feet of those  
who broke you



if you were born with  
the weakness to fall  
you were born with  
the strength to rise

perhaps the saddest of all  
are those who live waiting  
for someone they're not  
sure exists

- *7 billion people*



stay strong through your pain  
grow flowers from it  
you have helped me  
grow flowers out of mine so  
bloom beautifully  
dangerously  
loudly  
bloom softly  
however you need  
just bloom

- *to the reader*

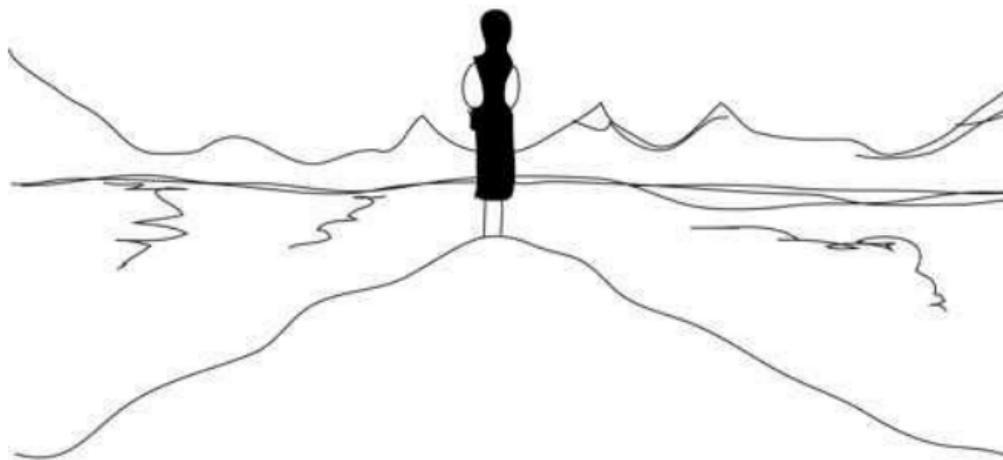
i thank the universe  
for taking  
everything it has taken  
and giving to me  
everything it is giving

- *balance*



it takes grace  
to remain kind  
in cruel situations

fall  
in love  
with your solitude

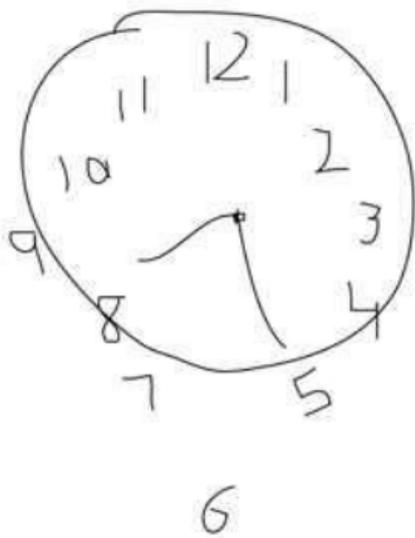


there is a difference between  
someone telling you  
they love you and  
them actually  
loving you

sometimes  
the apology  
never comes  
when it is wanted

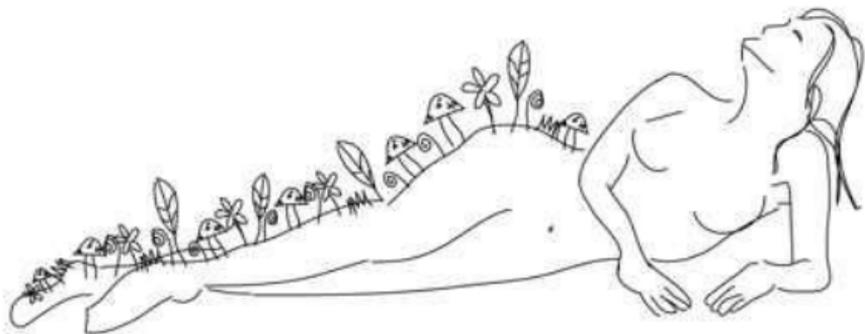
and when it comes  
it is neither wanted  
nor needed

- *you are too late*



you tell me  
i am not like most girls  
and learn to kiss me with your  
eyes closed  
something about the phrase—  
something about  
how i have to be unlike the women  
i call sisters in order to be wanted  
makes me want to spit your  
tongue out  
like i am supposed to be proud  
you picked me  
as if i should be relieved you think  
i am better than them

the next time he  
points out the  
hair on your legs is  
growing back remind  
that boy your body  
is not his home  
he is a guest  
warn him to  
never outstep  
his welcome  
again



to be

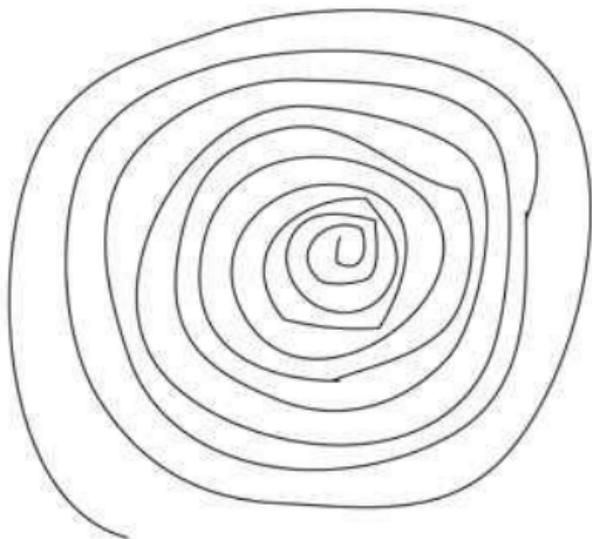
soft

is

to be

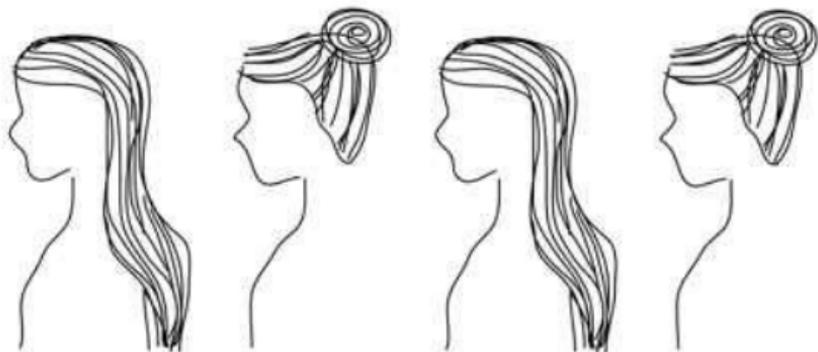
powerful

you deserve to be  
completely found  
in your surroundings  
not lost within them



i know it's hard  
believe me  
i know it feels like  
tomorrow will never come  
and today will be the most  
difficult day to get through  
but i swear you will get through  
the hurt will pass  
as it always does  
if you give it time and  
let it so let it  
go  
slowly  
like a broken promise  
let it go

i like the way the stretch marks  
on my thighs look human and  
that we're so soft yet  
rough and jungle wild  
when we need to be  
i love that about us  
how capable we are of feeling  
how unafraid we are of breaking  
and tend to our wounds with grace  
just being a woman  
calling myself  
a woman  
makes me utterly whole  
and complete



my issue with what they consider  
beautiful  
is their concept of beauty  
centers around excluding people  
i find hair beautiful  
when a woman wears it  
like a garden on her skin  
that is the definition of beauty  
big hooked noses  
pointing upward to the sky  
like they're rising  
to the occasion  
skin the color of earth  
my ancestors planted crops on  
to feed a lineage of women with  
thighs thick as tree trunks  
eyes like almonds

deeply hooded with conviction  
the rivers of punjab  
flow through my bloodstream so  
don't tell me my women  
aren't as beautiful  
as the ones in  
your country

our backs  
tell stories  
no books have  
the spine to  
carry

- *women of color*



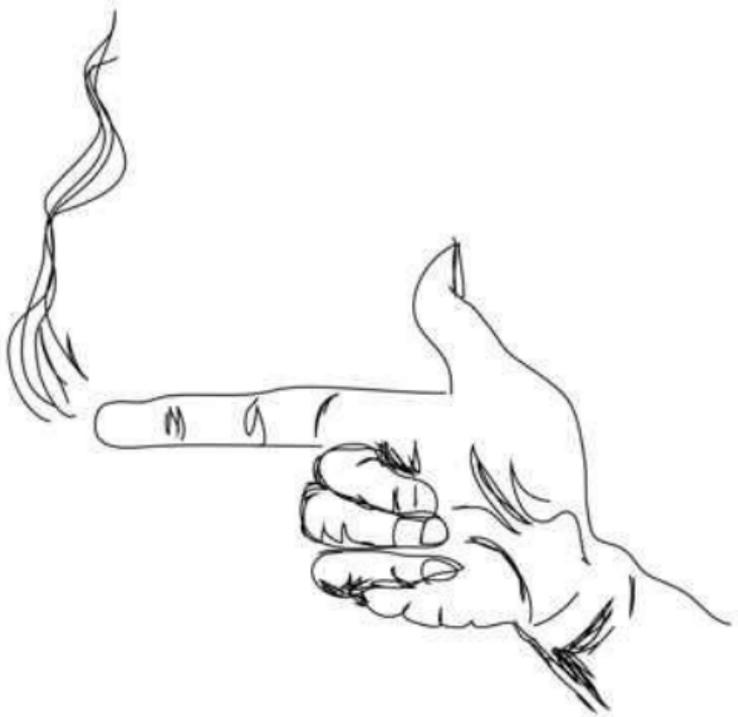
accept yourself  
as you were designed

your body  
is a museum  
of natural disasters  
can you grasp how  
stunning that is



losing you  
was the becoming  
of myself

other women's bodies  
are not our battlegrounds



removing all the hair  
off your body is okay  
if that's what you want to do  
just as much as keeping all the  
hair

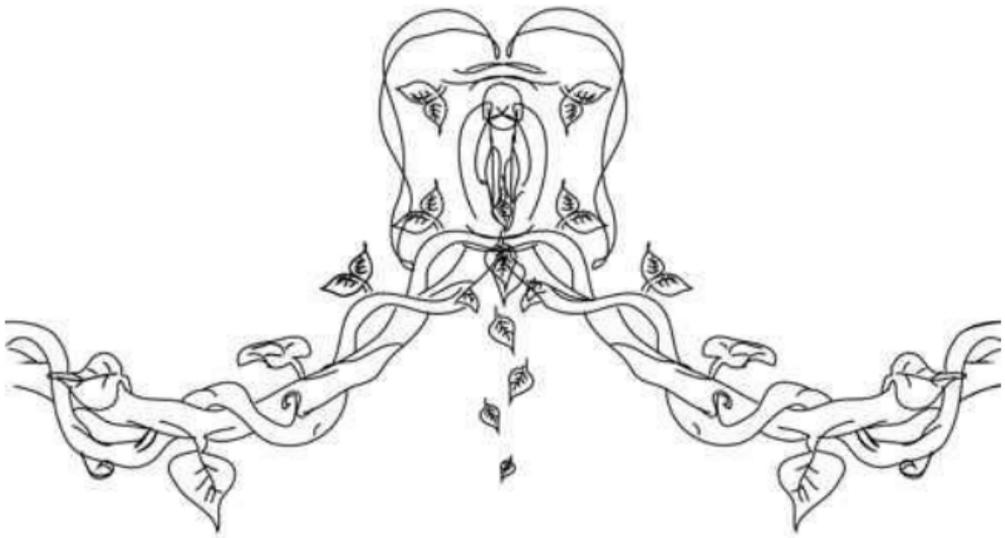
on your body is okay  
if that's what you want to do

*- you belong only to yourself*

apparently it is ungraceful of me  
to mention my period in public  
cause the actual biology  
of my body is too real

it is okay to sell what's  
between a woman's legs  
more than it is okay to  
mention its inner workings

the recreational use of  
this body is seen as  
beautiful while  
its nature is  
seen as ugly

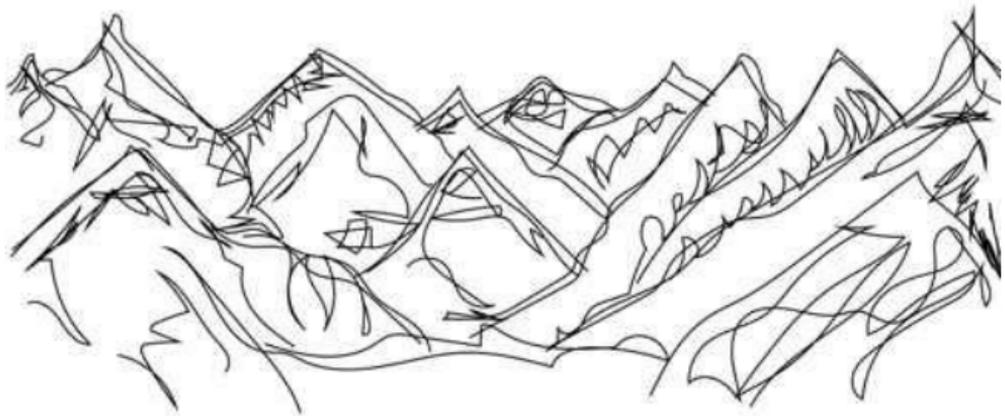


you were a dragon long before  
he came around and said  
you could fly

you will remain a dragon  
long after he's left

i want to apologize to all the  
women  
i have called pretty  
before i've called them intelligent  
or brave  
i am sorry i made it sound as  
though  
something as simple as what  
you're born with  
is the most you have to be proud  
of when your  
spirit has crushed mountains  
from now on i will say things like  
*you are resilient* or *you are  
extraordinary*  
not because i don't think you're  
pretty

but because you are so much more  
than that



i have  
what i have  
and i am happy

i've lost  
what i've lost  
and i am  
still  
happy

- *outlook*

you look at me and cry  
*everything hurts*

i hold you and whisper  
*but everything can heal*



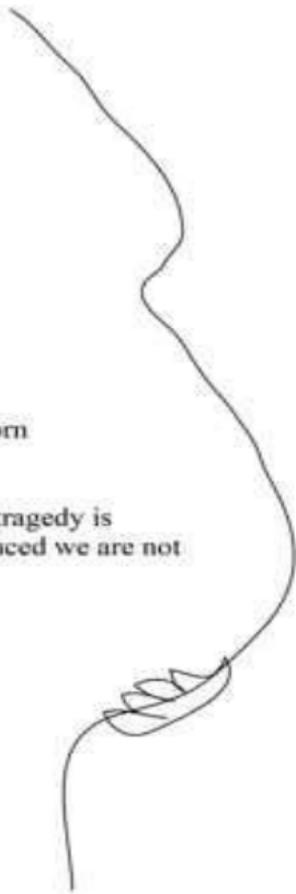
if the hurt comes  
so will the happiness

- *be patient*



we are all born  
so beautiful

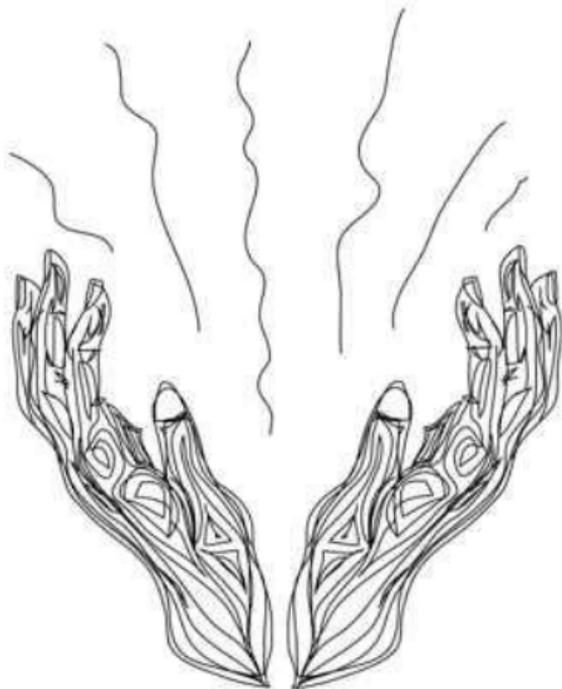
the greatest tragedy is  
being convinced we are not



the name kaur  
makes me a free woman  
it removes the shackles that  
try to bind me  
uplifts me  
to remind me i am equal to  
any man even though the state  
of this world screams to me i am  
not  
that i am my own woman and  
i belong wholly to myself  
and the universe  
it humbles me  
calls out and says i have a  
universal duty to share with  
humanity to nurture  
and serve the sisterhood

to raise those that need raising  
the name kaur runs in my blood  
it was in me before the word itself  
existed  
it is my identity and my liberation

- *kaur*  
*a woman of sikhi*

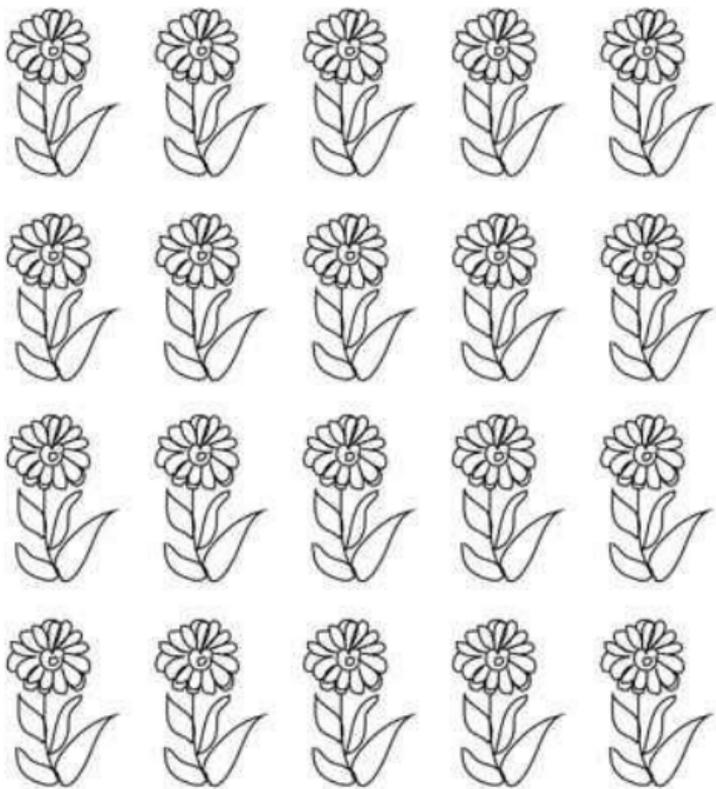


the world  
gives you  
so much pain  
and here you are  
making gold out of it

- *there is nothing purer than that*

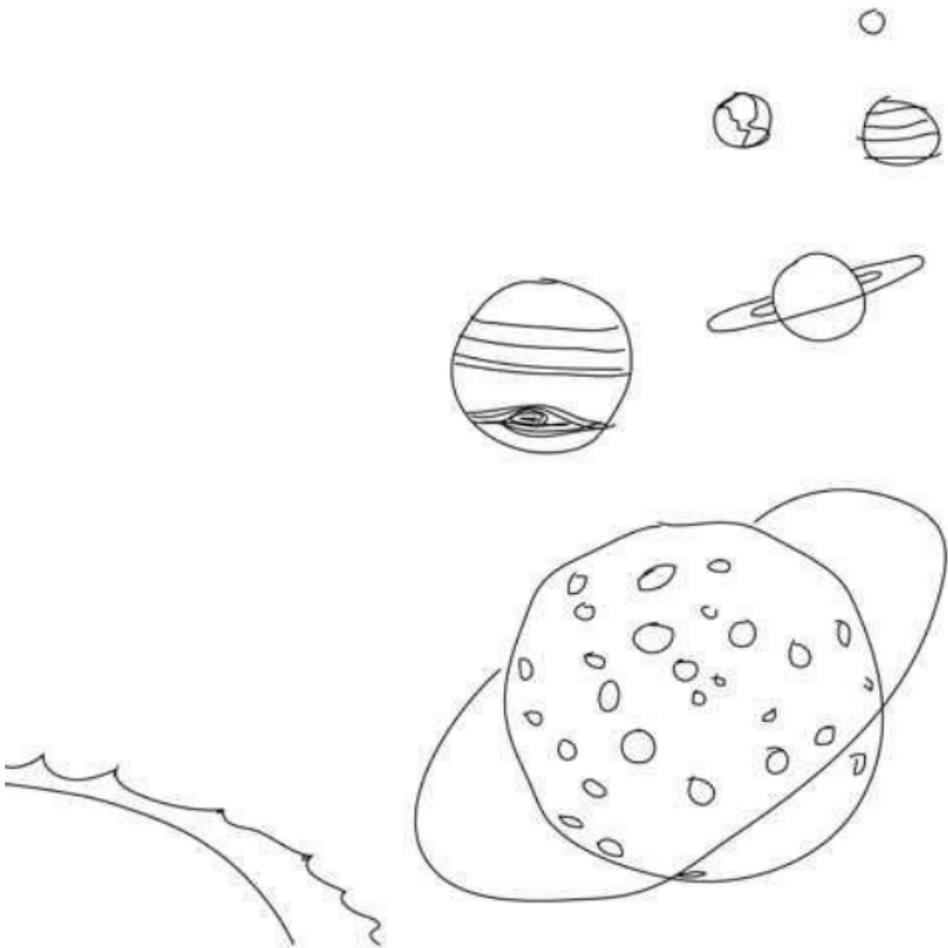
how you love yourself is  
how you teach others  
to love you

my heart aches for sisters more  
than anything  
it aches for women helping  
women  
like flowers ache for spring



the goddess between your legs  
makes mouths water

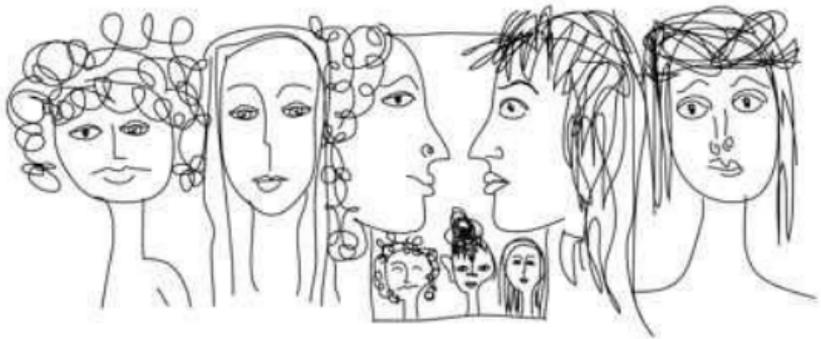
you  
are your own  
soul mate



some people  
are so bitter

to them  
you must be kindest

we all move forward when  
we recognize how resilient  
and striking the women  
around us are

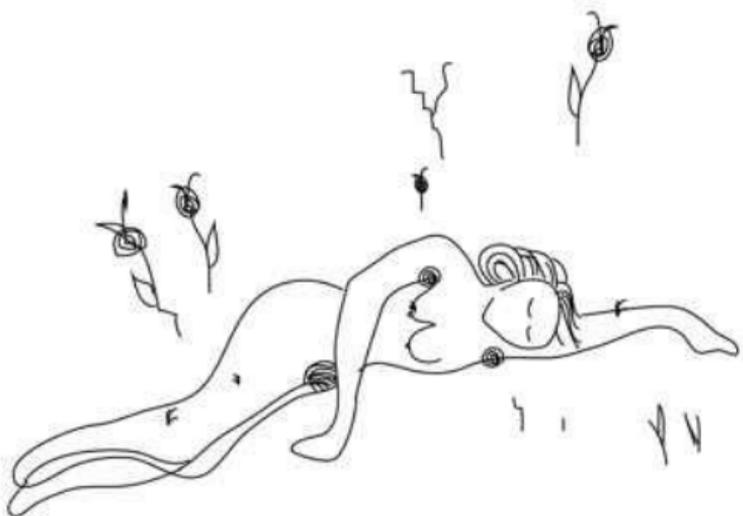


for you to see beauty here  
does not mean  
there is beauty in me  
it means there is beauty rooted  
so deep within you  
you can't help but  
see it everywhere

hair

if it was not supposed to be there  
would not be growing  
on our bodies in the first place

*- we are at war with what comes  
most naturally to us*

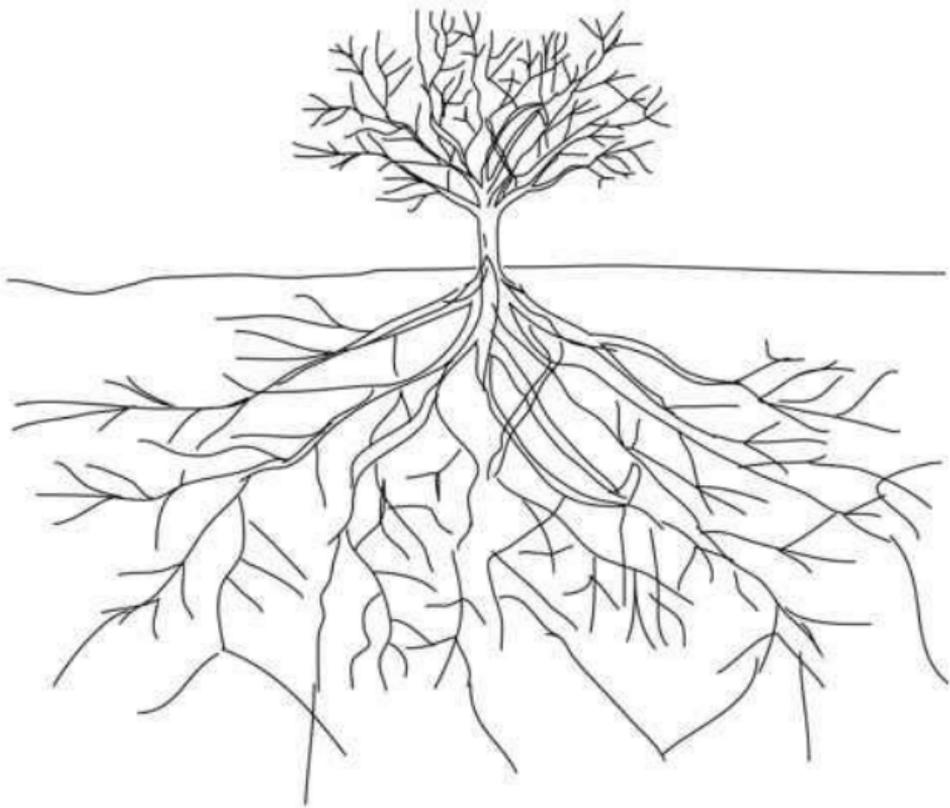


most importantly love  
like it's the only thing you know  
how  
at the end of the day all this  
means nothing  
this page  
where you're sitting  
your degree  
your job  
the money  
nothing even matters  
except love and human connection  
who you loved  
and how deeply you loved them  
how you touched the people  
around you  
and how much you gave them



i want to remain so  
rooted to the ground  
these tears  
these hands  
these feet  
sink in

- *grounded*



you have to stop  
searching for why at some point  
you have to leave it alone

if you are not enough for yourself  
you will never be enough  
for someone else



you must  
want to spend  
the rest of your life  
with yourself  
first

of course i want to be successful  
but i don't crave success for me  
i need to be successful to gain  
enough milk and honey  
to help those around  
me succeed



my heartbeat quickens at  
the thought of birthing poems  
which is why i will never stop  
opening myself up to conceive  
them

the lovemaking  
to the words  
is so erotic  
i am either in love  
or in lust with  
the writing  
or both

what terrifies me most is how we  
foam at the mouth with envy  
when others succeed  
but sigh in relief  
when they are failing

our struggle to  
celebrate each other is  
what's proven most difficult  
in being human



your art  
is not about how many people  
like your work  
your art  
is about  
if your heart likes your work  
if your soul likes your work  
it's about how honest  
you are with yourself  
and you  
must never  
trade honesty  
for relatability

*- to all you young poets*

give to those  
who have nothing  
to give to you

- *seva* (selfless service)



you split me open  
in the most honest  
way there is  
to split a soul open  
and forced me to write  
at a time i was sure i  
could not write again

- *thank you*



you have made it to the end. with my heart in your hands. thank you. for arriving here safely. for being tender with the most delicate part of me. sit down. breathe. you must be tired. let me kiss your hands. your eyes. they must be wanting of something sweet. i am sending you all my sugar. i would be nowhere and nothing if it were not for you. you've helped me become the woman i wanted to be. but was too afraid to be. do you have any idea how much of a miracle you are. how lovely it's been. and how lovely it will always be. i am kneeling before you. saying thank

you. i am sending my love to your eyes. may they always see goodness in people. and may you always practice kindness. may we see each other as one. may we be nothing short of in love with everything the universe has to offer. and may we always stay grounded. rooted. our feet planted firmly onto the earth.

*- a love letter from me to you*

rupi kaur is a writer and artist based in toronto, canada. throughout her poetry and illustrations she engages with themes of love, loss, trauma, healing, and femininity. she shares her writing with the world as a means to create a safe space for progressive healing and forward movement. her creative direction and photography have broken international boundaries and have since made it into galleries, magazines, and spaces around the world. when she is not writing or creating other art, she is traveling to perform spoken word, as well

as hosting writing workshops. you  
can find more of her work at:

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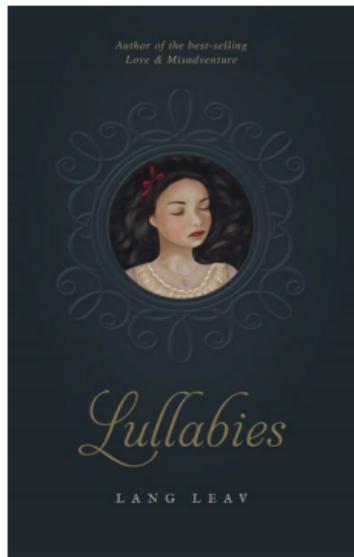
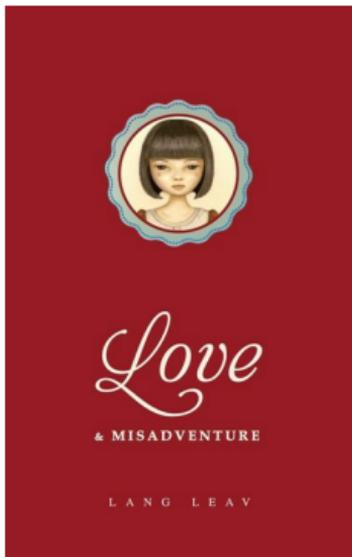
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trauma  
abuse  
healing  
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